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DEPARTMENT FOR D, SA, SA/INS, S/CT; NSC FOR
1E. MILLARD

LONDON FOR POL/RIEDEL

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SUBJECT: In Sri Lanka visit, A/S Rocca underscores support for peace track, urges parties to work together

Refs: Colombo 787, and previous

(U) Classified by Ambassador E. Ashley Wills:
Reasons: 1.5 (b,d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: SA A/S Rocca used her May 12 meetings with President Kumaratunga, Prime Minister Wickremesinghe, and other GSL officials to underline strong U.S. support for the peace process. Noting the recent spike in cohabitation tensions, A/S Rocca also urged that parties work together in the national interest. Both the president and the prime minister stressed their support for the peace track, with the president very critical of the Tigers. Re cohabitation, both indicated that they did not want to see an escalation in tensions. A/S Rocca's visit was very successful in highlighting strong U.S. support for Sri Lanka during this sensitive timeframe. END SUMMARY.

A/S Rocca's May 12 Meetings

2. (U) Assistant Secretary for South Asian Affairs Christina Rocca met May 12 with President Chandrika Kumaratunga, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, and Foreign Minister Tyronne Fernando. A/S Rocca also had tea with key ministers G.L. Peiris and Milinda Moragoda, and lunch with a selection of top Tamil politicians and think-tank analysts.

President makes Moderate Sounds

3. (C) At her meeting with A/S Rocca, President Kumaratunga was joined by former foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar and presidential spokesman Harim Peiris. A/S Rocca began the meeting by underscoring strong U.S. support for the peace process, and our hope that major parties will pull together to see it through. Sri Lanka should be proud that it is a model of conflict resolution for South Asia and other regions, she emphasized.

4. (C) President Kumaratunga responded that Sri Lankans truly value the assistance of their friends in the international community. Re the peace process, she stressed that she strongly supports the government's efforts. That said, she expressed concern that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have not really given up anything substantive in the peace talks, but the group has demanded much from the GSL. The international community must press the LTTE on human rights issues because the government had already surrendered much of its bargaining power and was not pressuring the Tigers enough. Kumaratunga went on to assert that the lack of professional, experienced peace monitors had been a source of much controversy. (Note: This was a reference to the Norwegian-run Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, "SLMM," which is charged with monitoring adherence to the February 2002 ceasefire agreement.)

5. (C) Ambassador Wills took the opportunity to brief the president on a recent document drafted by the donor community which contained milestones re development assistance, including re the observance of human rights (see Reftels). The current plan, he noted, was to present the document privately to both sides if and when talks resume. Kumaratunga warned that the current actions of the LTTE (e.g., blaming the GSL for delays in the talks, highlighting minor issues as major problems) are similar to those taken by the group in the past just before breaking off talks. Kumaratunga added that Deputy Secretary Armitage and the Ambassador had made very refreshing and helpful statements, which had served to reinforce the peace process.

6. (C) Turning to the tense cohabitation situation,

Kumaratunga asserted that the current rift over the Development Lotteries Board was much ado about nothing. (Note: Per Reftel review of recent events, the president tried to take over the lotteries board late last week, but the government blocked the move. Both sides are now reviewing next steps in this controversial matter.) She asserted that she had performed a minor administrative act to which the government had reacted violently and illegally. Her intent was not to create a crisis, she said, only to ensure that lottery proceeds were allotted in correct fashion. The Ambassador emphasized that the U.S., first and foremost, saw this issue as an internal matter. The way it was playing out, however, raised concerns that the two major parties were bickering to the net detriment of the peace process. Kumaratunga asserted that the government had made it impossible for cordial cohabitation relations. Members of the GSL, for example, did not routinely consult or inform her of what was going on, she said.

PM reviews Peace Process, Cohabitation

17. (C) In her meeting with Prime Minister Wickremesinghe, A/S Rocca expressed her pleasure at returning to Sri Lanka (she had also visited in March 2002), and assured him of strong and continued U.S. support for the peace process. Re the peace track, the PM commented that both the GSL and the LTTE had to look long-term. It would be helpful if they could jointly develop a road map with timeframes focused on keeping the international community engaged. A/S Rocca asked the PM about the LTTE's current mindset. The PM replied that he viewed the LTTE's recent pullout from the peace talks as being the result of the influence of Tiger hard-liners, who wanted the LTTE to re-establish control over the pace and agenda of the process. Wickremesinghe predicted that the LTTE's desire for funding and reconstruction assistance for the north and east would lead the group to change its mind and decide to attend the June donors conference in Tokyo. Minister Milinda Moragoda, also present at the meeting, added that the Tigers' lack of democratic experience was at the root of the peace process' current difficulties. Both Wickremesinghe and Moragoda expressed appreciation for consistent U.S. support for the peace track. Wickremesinghe reacted positively to a suggestion by Ambassador Wills for a possible "clear-the-air," low-key meeting between the GSL and the Tigers prior to Tokyo (if the LTTE decides to attend the conference).

18. (C) Expressing her concern about the recent spike in cohabitation stresses, A/S Rocca asked PM Wickremesinghe for his view of the evolving situation. The PM saw only two possible resolutions to the dispute over who controls the lotteries board: (1) talks with President Kumaratunga that would provide her some sort of face-saving cover to rescind her order taking over the board; or (2) escalating cohabitation tensions that would help no one. The prime minister added that he personally remained optimistic about a resolution to the dispute over the lotteries board, though he could not discount the likelihood of further cohabitation tensions. Wickremesinghe said his greatest fear was having the LTTE view this situation as a weakening of the government's resolve and power, hindering its efforts to achieve a negotiated settlement.

19. (C) In regard to international matters, A/S Rocca and PM Wickremesinghe exchanged views about the GSL's recent proposal to form some sort of group that would counter the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). The PM said the government wanted to form a group of moderate, developing countries that would work within the UN system on key international issues. A/S Rocca said the U.S. was very interested in the proposal and had compiled a preliminary list of possible countries that might join, including several from each geographical region. A/S Rocca asked what the GSL's next steps would be regarding the proposal, and how it anticipated its role vis-a-vis other voting blocs in the UN. Wickremesinghe, who referred to the possible grouping as "the axis of hope," stated that the GSL was still reviewing how to handle it. The plan as of this point was to float the idea publicly after the June donors conference in Tokyo and perhaps formally announce it during the UNGA in September. (Note: That evening at dinner Minister Morogoda asked for names of individuals from the countries we think might be interested in this proposal, saying that once he has the list he will contact them personally.) (Note: Wickremesinghe also commented that the GSL would like to have meetings with President Bush and high-level U.S. officials on the margins of UNGA.) At the close of the meeting, A/S Rocca expressed deep appreciation to the Sri Lankan

government for its November 2002 signing of an Article 98 waiver of International Criminal Court (ICC) jurisdiction with the U.S.

Tea with Key Ministers

110. (C) In her meeting with G.L. Peiris and Milinda Moragoda, A/S Rocca asked about the status of the peace process. Both ministers seemed somewhat optimistic that the LTTE would, in the end, return to the peace talks and decide to attend the June donors conference. Peiris stressed that the government was working hard to give the LTTE the assurances the group needed for it to return to the talks, especially in regard to the provision of funds for humanitarian assistance in the north and east. Morogoda underscored the importance of continuing to work with the LTTE. He admitted that it was not easy, but he thought the LTTE could be convinced to go in the right direction via constant consultation and explanation.

111. (C) On the subject of the latest cohabitation tensions, Minister Peiris claimed that the GSL had a strong legal case in that the president had not consulted with the PM regarding the attempt to take over the lotteries board. The Sri Lankan Constitution required such consultation, he stressed. Moreover, in taking such a rash action, she was losing the political fight, he claimed. All in all, Peiris said he thought the current situation could be worked out without more escalation. He allowed, however, that cohabitation ties would remain tense and subject to periodic crises, which he said stemmed from the president's irascibility and sense of entitlement. The government had information, for example, that the president might be using the lotteries board matter as a "test" before trying to replace the interior minister, but it was not clear, he noted.

Brief Meeting with the FM

112. (C) In her brief meeting with Foreign Minister Fernando, A/S Rocca provided a readout on her recent visit to India and Pakistan. FM Fernando commented that peace in the South Asia was critical to Sri Lanka, and it would be positive for the region if the Indians and Pakistanis continued to work to lower tensions. Foreign Secretary Nihal Rodrigo, who was also in the meeting,

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noted India's nervousness due to Pakistan's chairing of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). A/S Rocca replied that the U.S. was watching the situation closely and continued to hope that SAARC could help bridge differences. A/S Rocca remarked that Sri Lanka was an excellent model for the rest of the international community, including South Asia, and she urged the government to persevere in the peace track. Fernando replied that the government was committed to the peace process, and hoped that the LTTE would soon return to the talks and come to the June donors conference. Regarding the latest re cohabitation, Fernando remarked that he thought the situation could be worked out without a major escalation in tensions. He averred that the U.S. and others in the international community could play a role in smoothing the waters. (Note: The FM was also the host of a May 12 dinner in honor of A/S Rocca. Muslim leader Raul Hakeem, chief of the Peace Secretariat Bernard Goonetilleke, and other key GSL ministers and officials attended the dinner.)

Lunch with Tamil MPs, NGO Representatives

113. (C) The May 12 lunch with several Tamil National Alliance (TNA) MPs and representatives of local think-tanks and NGOs was a lively affair. Senior TNA MP R. Sampathan asserted that the LTTE was raising legitimate complaints re the delivery of humanitarian assistance and the size of the security zones in the Jaffna District. Until the LTTE had satisfaction re these matters, they would not return to negotiations, according to Sampathan. When queried, TNA MP G. Ponnambalam replied that if the Tigers did not attend the planned June donors conference, then the conference should be postponed until the LTTE's participation could be assured. Vigorously countering the pro-LTTE trend of these comments, Kethesh Loganathan, a local think-tank analyst who is Tamil, said there were many views in the Tamil community and the LTTE had no right to claim to speak for all Tamils. National Unity Alliance (NUA) MP Ferial Ashraff, a Muslim, complained about LTTE actions

in the east, noting that the group continued to harass and extort money from Muslims. Ambassador Wills noted the copious evidence that the Tigers were assassinating opponents in the Tamil community. In response to these points, Sampathan replied that the LTTE had a lot of growing up to do before it would become a genuine political organization, but the group was slowly moving in the right direction.

COMMENT

14. (C) A/S Rocca's visit was very successful in highlighting to interlocutors strong U.S. support for Sri Lanka and its people during this sensitive timeframe. Both the president and the prime minister, for example, tried to appear reasonable in discussing the cohabitation situation with A/S Rocca. This tone of moderation seems to have worn off a bit on both sides in that the cohabitation situation does not appear as acute now as it did previously (though it could still escalate). Moreover, during a difficult timeframe for the peace process, the Assistant Secretary was able to underscore to the GSL our support for its policies while noting our concerns about LTTE behavior. Overall, as exemplified by A/S Rocca's latest visit, Sri Lankans clearly appreciate continued high-level U.S. interest, seeing such engagement as vital in helping return the country to long-term peace and security. END COMMENT.

15. (U) Minimize considered.

WILLS